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NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
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# **Paramount Interest: Command Relationships in Amphibious Warfare**

by  
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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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## **Abstract**

### *Paramount Interest: Command Relationships in Amphibious Warfare*

In 2001, U.S. amphibious forces abandoned sixty years of established command and control doctrine, replacing the traditional senior-subordinate relationship between Navy and Marine commanders with coequal command. This change seems to fly in the face of the principle of war that advises unity of command. Why did it change?

This paper examines the development of amphibious doctrine during World War II, when command relationships were worked out under fire. There were differences between the Pacific and European theaters, reflecting the service traditions of the landing forces, as well as British command traditions. Comparing U.S. experience with command models at Guadalcanal and Tarawa with that used at Salerno highlights contrasts between the two approaches.

There have been many changes—both in technology and practice—in amphibious warfare since World War II. An overview of these developments shows why the old doctrine needed to change and how new practices made change possible. Modern amphibious practice works well in the slightly hazy uncertainty of coequal command, which provides flexibility to the joint task force commander. As the Expeditionary Strike Group concept develops, the advantages of coequal command should not be forgotten.

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## **Introduction**

In 2001, U.S. amphibious forces abandoned sixty years of established command and control doctrine, replacing the traditional senior-subordinate relationship between Navy and Marine commanders with coequal command. This change seems to fly in the face of the principle of war that advises unity of command. Why did it change?

This paper examines the development of amphibious doctrine during World War II, when command relationships were worked out under fire. During the 1920s U.S. planners had thought through the many alternatives—including coequal relationships—before settling on the doctrine that served so well in both the Pacific and European theaters. There were, however, differences between the two theaters, reflecting the service traditions of the landing forces, as well as British command traditions. Comparing U.S. experience in the two theaters highlights contrasts between the two approaches.

There have been many changes—both in technology and practice—in amphibious warfare since World War II. An overview of these developments shows why long-standing doctrine needed to change and how new practices have made that change feasible. Modern amphibious practice works well in the slightly hazy uncertainty of coequal command, where, more than ever, unity of effort depends on close cooperation, professional working relationships, and trust. Although the coequal command structure seems an awkward departure from established doctrine and decades of practice, there is precedent for the new arrangement and good reason for the change.

## Change in Doctrine

Amphibious warfare is an unusual hybrid by its very nature, spanning the seam between traditional warfare disciplines at sea and ashore. Success requires close cooperation between naval forces and landing forces, each with their own mission, planning considerations, priorities, and tactics. The Navy is concerned with moving ships across the ocean, protecting those ships while at sea, and mounting amphibious operations in the littorals of a potentially hostile shore. The Marine Corps focuses on delivering combat power ashore at the most advantageous point, building up support rapidly with both reinforcements and logistic support, and sequencing the flow of forces ashore. As Major General Julian Smith, commander of landing forces at Tarawa, noted in 1953,

Both viewpoints are equally vital. There will be no landing if the Navy does not take the Marines safely to the objective, and the operation will fail unless the Marines win their fight on shore. The coordination of these viewpoints requires tact, patience, and mutual understanding on the part of both the naval and Marine Commanders.<sup>1</sup>

It is a complicated business. In addition to the warfare functions unique to each service, amphibious operations invariably include functions where interests overlap, such as control of ship-to-shore movement or coordination of close air support. Furthermore, execution of these functions may depend on shared use of limited resources. Where there is no purely logical basis for assigning responsibility, the Navy and Marine Corps have depended on long usage, often dating back to compromises made in the early days of the Second World War.

In order to coordinate the effort, doctrine has traditionally assigned overall responsibility for the operation to the senior Navy commander of the amphibious task force. The landing force commander remained subordinate while embarked in amphibious shipping until his

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<sup>1</sup> Julian C. Smith, "Tarawa," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, 79 (November 1953): 1170. Smith, who was perceptive and persuasive on matters of doctrine, graduated from the Naval War College in 1917.

forces were firmly established ashore, when doctrine provided for a transfer of command.

The Navy commander was responsible for getting forces to the objective area, assaulting the objective, and supporting the buildup of combat power ashore. Once the landing force commander had a secure beachhead and could move his headquarters ashore, the command relationship would change as command of the landing forces passed to the commander responsible for the land battle ashore.<sup>2</sup>

The new doctrine introduced in 2001 does away with the traditional relationship.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the naval commander and the landing force commander are coequals, reporting to a common superior who is most often not embarked at sea, and therefore not collocated. The governing principle of this approach is called *support*, which designates one of the two commanders as the supported commander and the other as the supporting commander, who is required to “aid, protect, complement and sustain” the other force. This arrangement, as explained in joint doctrine,

conveys priorities to commanders and staffs that are planning joint operations.... The supported commander will have the authority to exercise general direction of the supporting effort...[including] the designation and prioritization of targets or objectives, timing and duration of the supporting action.... The supporting commander determines the forces, tactics, methods, procedures and communications to be employed in providing this support.<sup>4</sup>

The two commanders remain equals in the command structure, and surrender none of the authority or responsibility for their respective command. The *support* command relationship serves to establish priorities, from which flow allocation of resources and a unity of effort. It

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<sup>2</sup> This doctrine is still reflected in Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Amphibious Embarkation*, Joint Pub 3-02.2 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 1993), II-13, and in North American Treaty Organization, *Doctrine for Amphibious Operations*, ATP-8, 2-7 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Amphibious Operations*, Joint Pub 3-02 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Support as a command authority is discussed in Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Unified Action Armed Forces*, Joint Pub 0-2 (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2001), III-9.



provides a sophisticated, intentionally vague, and inherently flexible approach to commanding amphibious operations.

U.S. doctrine in the 1920s had anticipated this arrangement. Joint doctrine provided two possible command relationships between Army and Navy commanders in joint operations: unity of command or paramount interest. The older of the two was paramount interest, which presupposed coequal commanders who would cooperate to achieve unity of effort, with responsibility for coordination lying with the commander whose requirements were of greater importance, or, in the language of the doctrine, the one with paramount interest.<sup>5</sup> In the unity of command model, one commander *works for* the other; in the paramount interest model, one commander *works with* the other. It is the difference between command and cooperation.

### **Amphibious Doctrine Development**

The need for joint doctrine first became apparent during the Spanish American War.<sup>6</sup> In July, 1898, Admiral William T. Sampson and General William R. Shafter took forces to attack Santiago, Cuba, in a clumsy operation that vividly illustrated fundamental problems in commanding joint operations. They fought with each other, in the most polite terms, about everything. Sampson remained at sea in his flagship, worried about mines in the harbor and the guns of the defensive fortifications. Shafter, with forces established ashore, postponed a land-based assault on the town while he urged Sampson to force the harbor. For his part, Sampson wanted Shafter to take the forts so that he could clear the harbor of mines. There was no mechanism to deconflict the priorities, no unity of command or effort, and no

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<sup>5</sup> James Joseph Henry, "A Historical Review of the Development of Doctrine for Command Relationships in Amphibious Warfare," (Unpublished Research Paper, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS: 2000), 31-32.

common superior short of President McKinley, who, through equally uncooperative service secretaries, ineffectually implored the bickering commanders to work out their differences.<sup>7</sup>

The assault on Santiago was a fiasco. The dysfunctional relationship between Army and Navy commanders on scene demonstrated the pressing need for a doctrine to govern the conduct of joint operations. A Joint Board was established in 1903 to iron out the doctrinal seam between the two services.<sup>8</sup> Its authority was advisory only, however, and its recommendations to the services were no more than that. One of the eventual outgrowths of the Board's deliberations between the wars was a publication called *Joint Action of the Army and the Navy*,<sup>9</sup> first published in 1927 and significantly revised in 1935. Among other things, this publication outlined two methods of coordinating joint operations between the Army and Navy, either paramount interest or unity of command.<sup>10</sup>

The provisions of this joint publication did not apply to amphibious operations conducted by the Navy and Marine Corps. The Marine Corps has always worked closely with the Navy, partly as a way of distinguishing and defending itself as an institution apart from the Army. From their earliest work together, when Marines were most commonly employed as detachments on ships, there was a long tradition of the Marines being naturally subordinate to Navy command.

One of the primary missions of the Marine Corps was to conduct amphibious operations to acquire advance bases for the Navy, acting as "amphibious shock troops."<sup>11</sup> In the aftermath of World War I and the downsizing of armed forces all over the world, the Marines

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>7</sup> Louis J. Gulliver, "Sampson and Shafter at Santiago," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, 65 (June 1939): 799-806.

<sup>8</sup> Kenneth J. Clifford, *Amphibious Warfare Development in Britain and America from 1920 to 1940* (Laurens, NY: Edgewood, Inc., 1983), 145.

<sup>9</sup> Joint Board, *Joint Action of the Army and Navy* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1927).

<sup>10</sup> Henry, 33.

seized on this unique mission and concentrated on finding workable solutions to the thorny problems of amphibious command and control. As Admiral W.H.P. Blandy, commander of amphibious forces at Iwo Jima and Okinawa, noted in 1951, “if it had not been for the constant urging of the Marine Corps the amphibious art would hardly have been developed at all.”<sup>12</sup>

As Marine Corps planners set about the development of doctrine for amphibious operations, they were mindful of the British disaster at Gallipoli in 1915. Gallipoli had led many to conclude that amphibious assault against a defended shore was simply impossible. The Marine Corps looked more closely and concluded that the problems at Gallipoli—“faulty doctrine, ineffective techniques, poor leadership, and an utter lack of coordination between the services”-- could be overcome.<sup>13</sup>

The *Tentative Landing Manual* was the Marine Corps’ first blueprint for amphibious operations. The *Manual* provided a system for organizing landing forces, embarking in amphibious shipping, techniques for ship-to-shore movement, systems for controlling supporting fires, and a systematic assessment of logistics support requirements. It also tackled the problem of command and control, although not in the detail that would later become necessary.<sup>14</sup> In their discussion of the problems of command and control, Isely and Crowl point out that “since the Fleet Marine Force was by definition under the administrative command of the navy, many of these latent difficulties were theoretically eliminated.

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<sup>11</sup> Joseph H. Alexander, *Utmost Savagery* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 79.

<sup>12</sup> W.H.P. Blandy, “Command Relations in Amphibious Warfare,” U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 77 (June 1951): 579.

<sup>13</sup> Isely and Crowl, 5.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Marine Corps, *Tentative Manual for Landing Operations* (Quantico, VA: 1934).

Consequently the *Tentative Landing Manual* devotes comparatively little space to the question.”<sup>15</sup>

As America headed into war in 1942, the Marine Corps’ historic subordination to Navy superiors ensured unity of command in amphibious doctrine. The Marine landing force commander would serve as one of the subordinates of the Navy commander who was overall responsible for the amphibious operation. Other subordinates would include the screening force commander, the mine clearance group, the naval gunfire group and others, depending on the specific demands of the operation. How well did it work? Results were mixed.

### **Pacific Theater Model**

The war in the Pacific was principally a naval war. The island-hopping campaign, devised by Admiral Ernest J. King as an alternative to General Douglas MacArthur’s land-centric focus on retaking the Philippines,<sup>16</sup> required a series of amphibious assaults staged from Navy ships by Marines. It was natural for planners to adopt the doctrine codified in the *Tentative Manual*, which had subsequently been adopted by the Navy as Fleet Tactical Publication 167, *Landing Operations Doctrine*.<sup>17</sup> The agreed doctrine, as practiced during exercises before the war, led to a shared understanding that amphibious operations were wholly a naval matter, decidedly not joint in nature, and would unquestionably be under the command of a Navy commander, at least initially until a lodgment was established ashore.<sup>18</sup> Particularly in the Pacific theater, where King had strong opinions and often had his way,

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<sup>15</sup> Jeter Allen Isely and Philip Axtell Crowl, *The U.S. Marines and Amphibious War: Its Theory and Practice in the Pacific* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 37.

<sup>16</sup> Louis Morton, *The War in the Pacific. Strategy and Command: the First Two Years* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center for Military History, 1962), 296.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Navy, *Landing Operations Doctrine*, FTP 167 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1938).

<sup>18</sup> John Miller, Jr., *The War in the Pacific, Guadalcanal: The First Offensive* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1949), 15.

there was a strong preference for unity of command as the model for command relationships.<sup>19</sup>

The first test at Guadalcanal in September, 1942, uncovered several problems with command arrangements that urgently needed resolution. On scene command of the operation was given to Admiral Frank Jack Fletcher. In addition to amphibious forces, he also commanded the carrier strike force that would screen the landing. Under Fletcher, the amphibious operation itself would be commanded by Rear Admiral Richmond K. Turner, while Major General Alexander A. Vandegrift, commander of the First Marine Division, would remain subordinate to Turner throughout the operation.<sup>20</sup> (See Figure 1.)

From the point of view of command and control, there were two important lessons learned at Guadalcanal. First, the unity of command vested in Fletcher did not ensure a unity of effort. Fletcher did not share the priorities of Turner and Vandergrift, who were focused on the success of the amphibious mission. Instead, Fletcher's top concern was the safety of his carriers. As Japanese attacks at sea intensified, Fletcher decided to withdraw from the area, even at the expense of the support owed to the amphibious landing.<sup>21</sup> Without the defense of the screening force, Turner reluctantly withdrew the now-exposed amphibious shipping, leaving Vandergrift ashore to his own devices.<sup>22</sup> Many Marines have never forgiven the Navy for this abandonment.

The second lesson was that the landing force commander needed more voice in planning the operation. For all of his enthusiasm and determination, Turner was not experienced in

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<sup>19</sup> Morton, 361.

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol. V, *The Struggle for Guadalcanal* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Co., 1951), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Morison, 28, and George C. Dyer, *The Amphibians Came to Conquer: the Story of Admiral Richard Kelly Turner* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Navy, 1972), 390 ff.

<sup>22</sup> Dyer, 401 and 407.

directing landing force operations ashore. Surprisingly, this did not prevent him from meddling in Vandegrift's affairs. The two men had different conceptions of the operation that were never truly resolved.<sup>23</sup> Vandegrift wanted to focus all available combat power on securing the airfield on Guadalcanal itself. Turner clung to the early Navy ambition to secure the outlying port at Ndeni. Since Turner retained full command of the landing force, he was able to reconfigure Marine forces and direct them to undertake missions that did not support Vandegrift's objectives.<sup>24</sup> It was a serious problem.

The first problem—Fletcher's distraction from the main effort—was not a structural fault, but a service culture prejudice that would only be resolved as Navy commanders began to appreciate the priorities of the amphibious mission and to accept responsibility for its success. By the time the Navy-Marine Corps team reached Tarawa in the fall of 1943, Admiral Raymond A. Spruance had learned the lesson and was dedicated to support the landing forces ashore.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Halsey has been criticized for paralleling Fletcher's mistake when he was distracted at Leyte Gulf from his responsibility of defending the amphibious assault.<sup>26</sup>

The second problem was structural and remedied before the assault on Tarawa by a change in the command relationships. (See Figure 2.) In recognition that the Marines had unique priorities ashore that demanded equal consideration, the landing force commander was made coequal to the amphibious shipping commander during the planning phase of the

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<sup>23</sup> John A. Lorelli, *To Foreign Shores: U.S. Amphibious Operations in World War II* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press), 47.

<sup>24</sup> Isely and Crowl, 153-156.

<sup>25</sup> Dyer, 630.

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of the United States Naval Operations in World War II*. Vol. XII. *Leyte* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Co., 1958), 193.

operation.<sup>27</sup> The landing forces would remain subordinate during the operation's execution, but an important step had been made.

Launched in November, 1943, Tarawa marked the first assault on a defended beach since the British assault on Gallipoli in 1915. The landing force commander, Major General Julian Smith,<sup>28</sup> commanding general 2<sup>nd</sup> Marine Division, recognized it as a make-or-break operation for the Marine Corps. It was a full and thorough test of Marine Corps doctrine, and a validation of the premise that such an assault was indeed possible.<sup>29</sup> As Alexander noted, "Tarawa provided the essential watershed between Gallipoli and the great amphibious landings of 1944-45."<sup>30</sup>

The assault on Tarawa, although hotly contested and hard won, went well. In addition to the innovation in command relationships, mechanisms were established for coordinating supporting naval fires and close air support from both carrier and land based air.<sup>31</sup> The doctrine developed in this operation became the standard for U.S. amphibious warfare for the next sixty years. While overall command was given to the Navy for execution of the operation, the landing force commander was coequal for planning and enjoyed a greater freedom of action in directing the battle ashore.

## **European Theater Model**

In Europe, there were three differences that dictated a modified approach to amphibious command and control. First, from the very beginning at Casablanca, there were the inevitable compromises stemming from combined operations with British allies, who

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<sup>27</sup> Isely and Crowl, 202.

<sup>28</sup> For a vivid portrait of Smith, see Joseph H. Alexander, *Utmost Savagery* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 45 ff.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, 1164. See also Dyer, 649, and Alexander, 79.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander, 236.

<sup>31</sup> Blandy, 574.

reasonably expected a meaningful role in the planning and control of amphibious operations. In one sense, this meant incorporating commanders from both countries into the command structure in deference to the demands of coalition politics.<sup>32</sup>

At Salerno, for instance, the theater commander was American, the three component commanders were British, and the three on-scene commanders were American. The theater commander was General Dwight D. Eisenhower. His service component commanders were General Sir Harold Alexander, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham, and Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Tedder. On scene, General Mark C. Clark commanded 5<sup>th</sup> Army, Admiral H. Kent Hewitt commanded forces afloat, and Major General E.J. House commanded air forces, although he was not embarked in the command ship *USS Alcon* with Clark and Hewitt.<sup>33</sup> (See Figure 3.)

Second, it meant acknowledging the British tradition of cooperation between coequal commanders. Rather than structure joint forces to ensure unity of command, the British depended on cooperation and unity of effort to master the competing priorities of joint operations.<sup>34</sup> This preference was reflected in the command structure of joint campaigns throughout the war in Europe.

Third, and perhaps most significantly, landing forces in the European theater were drawn from the Army instead of the Marine Corps. The Army did not share the Marine Corps' heavy investment in amphibious doctrine as it was developed through the 1930s. Unlike their Marine counterparts in the Pacific, Army commanders were not studied in the unique problems of amphibious command and control. In fact, "most high-ranking army officers considered amphibious problems not especially difficult, an attitude that delayed a well-

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<sup>32</sup> Lorelli, 87, and Clifford, 170.

<sup>33</sup> Command organization taken from Hewitt, 960.



defined amphibious doctrine.”<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the Army in Europe saw Navy shipping as little more than transportation to the objective area, with the emphasis clearly centered on the fight ashore. Once the Navy delivered the Army landing forces ashore, they would continue their drive across continental land masses, whether starting in Morocco, Salerno or Normandy.

By contrast, the Marines in the Pacific theater had a more intimate and lasting relationship with their Navy counterparts. At the conclusion of each island conquest, the Marine landing forces would hand over the island to an Army occupying force and reembark for the next island assault.<sup>36</sup> It was a fundamentally different outlook on the primacy of amphibious operations as a warfighting discipline. The Marines remained focused on the amphibious assault and dedicated to solving the problems of command across the beachhead.

The assault at Salerno illustrates each of the three differences. Instead of a joint task force composed and organized for a unique operation, campaigns in the Mediterranean worked from a component commander model that outlasted all of the individual operations. Since it was a much smaller theater than the Pacific, it was theoretically simpler for each service to maintain its own command structure. At Salerno, Army, Navy and Air Corps forces did not share a common commander below General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who, as theater commander, was headquartered in North Africa with larger responsibilities than the success of any single operation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Blandy, 573.

<sup>35</sup> Lorelli, 18.

<sup>36</sup> Isely and Crowl, 95.

<sup>37</sup> Theodore L. Gatchel, “Eagles and Alligators: An Examination of the Command Relationships That Have Existed Between Aircraft Carrier and Amphibious Forces During Amphibious Operations” (Unpublished Occasional Paper of The Center for Naval Warfare Studies, U.S. Naval War College, 1997), 42.

Irrespective of command arrangements, Salerno did not go well. Communication with forces ashore was non-existent, which made it virtually impossible for embarked commanders to follow the course of the battle, or realistically assess the support requirements ashore.<sup>38</sup> On the second day of operations ashore, facing determined German opposition, Admiral Hewitt and General Clark seriously considered withdrawing forces from the beach for redeployment—a risky operation that would likely have resulted in disaster.

The communications breakdown seriously hampered the transition of command authority to forces ashore. On 10 November, D+1, Hewitt sent a note to Clark's subordinate and commander of the initial assault, Major General Ernest K. Dawley, directing him to go ashore and assume command of the battle, primarily because the breakdown in communications had made command from *Alcon* impossible.<sup>39</sup> As it happened, he had already gone ashore with two staff officers on his own initiative. Several hours later, as reports from shore clarified the picture, Hewitt sent a contradictory note directing Dawley to remain embarked. Only the second note caught up with Dawley ashore, where it made no sense without the first note. Meanwhile, Dawley vacillated, deciding to undertake a tour of the battlefield before taking charge from his division commander. Clark later concluded that many of the problems ashore at Salerno were attributable to Dawley and, for his desultory prosecution of the assault on the south beach, Dawley was relieved of his command.<sup>40</sup>

This incident illustrates the fragility inherent in the process of passing command ashore. Although the plan called for Hewitt to retain command until the landing force commander was established ashore, lack of communications forced a departure from doctrine that may

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<sup>38</sup> Lorelli, 149.

<sup>39</sup> Morris, 144.

<sup>40</sup> Hewitt, 972, and Pond, 154.

have made matters worse. Doctrine later set a high standard for situational awareness both afloat and ashore before the shift of command was attempted.

Despite the component command model followed in Europe, the doctrine for amphibious command during the assault itself was similar to that used in the Pacific. As the Navy commander, Hewitt was in command of all Allied forces at sea, including Clark's 5<sup>th</sup> Army landing forces. For his part, Clark was comfortable with this temporary arrangement, and understood the need. His frustration lay with the larger implications of the component command model, which, for example, required coordinating air defense through Air Chief Marshall Tedder, whose headquarters were in North Africa:

I accepted Hewitt as being in command until we had landed and established a toehold on the beaches. Until that time, Hewitt would have to depend on cooperation with Tedder for air cover; after we landed I would have to do the same in order to get air support for ground operations. Such a system, it seemed to me, could lead to grave difficulties.<sup>41</sup>

Indeed, the majority of the lessons from Salerno concerned command structure at this higher level rather than the operational control of amphibious forces under Hewitt. From the standpoint of amphibious doctrine, the greatest difficulty arose from communications failures that led to utter confusion in the transfer of command ashore.

### **Common problems doctrine must address**

In a 1951 *Proceedings* article, Admiral Blandy acknowledged the difficulties in exercising command when amphibious operations require the “unaccustomed admixture of at least two services.” He attributed failures to one or more of four causes:

- lack of joint planning and training
- lack of mutual confidence

- assumption of too much authority by one commander
- unwillingness to take risks<sup>42</sup>

This perceptive list goes to the heart of the special problems which any sound amphibious doctrine must address. The requirement for joint planning was addressed by Turner's innovation of making Navy and Marines coequal for planning, a concession that has been consistently respected in amphibious operations through the present. Joint training is the product of service commitments to regular, realistic practice.

An effort has been made to address each of Blandy's other three concerns through the application of unity of command. In theory, if one commander is given authority and responsibility for the entire operation, then he will be in a position to overcome these amorphous problems. However, as experience in the Pacific campaigns demonstrated, unity of command alone does not necessarily resolve the problems.

### **Has the world changed?**

The environment in which amphibious forces operate today has changed in dramatic and fundamental ways since the days when doctrine was first hammered out under fire in the Pacific. Technology, mature patterns of peacetime employment, and new thinking in joint doctrine have all led to the seminal change in amphibious command and control.

The explosion in communications is the most striking change in military capability since World War II. It is now much easier for staffs to communicate efficiently both up and across chains of command. Quick, reliable, ubiquitous communications facilitate the development of sophisticated plans, even among forces embarked at sea. Reliable communication has also

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<sup>41</sup> Mark C. Clark, *Calculated Risk* (New York: Harpers & Brothers, 1950), 185. For the difficulties he faced in maintaining the priority for air coverage over the amphibious operations, see Hewitt, 969.

<sup>42</sup> Blandy, p. 570.

enhanced the commander's knowledge of the battlespace. The fog of war will never dissipate completely, and it is as much a problem today as it was sixty years ago. Today an embarked landing force commander has a fuller picture of the developing battle ashore than Mark Clark could ever have imagined.

The practice of routine deployments has affected amphibious command relationships as well. Relationships between Navy and landing force commanders during World War II were relatively short-lived, with commanders often working together for no more than the duration of a single operation. Many of the Navy commanders responsible for amphibious operations during the war had spent little time thinking about the complexities of the problem and had no experience. Turner, for instance, knew nothing of amphibious warfare when he was abruptly given charge of the assault at Guadalcanal. By comparison, amphibious forces today train together, conduct exercises together and spend months together at sea, drawing on decades of established practice and the professionalism of experienced officers in both the Navy and Marine Corps. The relationship is no longer an *ad hoc* arrangement cobbled together for a single operation, but a standing collection of compromises and concessions between institutions wedded for the long haul.

The doctrine of Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS) has changed the underlying assumptions of amphibious operations. Command structures were once driven by the ultimate goal of the landing force commander establishing his headquarters ashore and shifting command of the landing forces. This transition ashore is no longer an implicit goal of doctrine, since technology and the benefits of agile maneuver often lead the landing force commander to remain embarked at sea. Marine Corps doctrine specifically anticipates that

“most command and control will remain afloat rather than ashore.”<sup>43</sup> If the landing force commander does not go ashore, then he could reasonably aspire to a command arrangement that did not keep him indefinitely subordinate to Navy command.

For better or worse, modern U.S. joint operations are based on the component command model. Forces are grouped together by function, with a one commander responsible to the joint task force commander for naval forces, another for land forces, and another for air forces. This reflects an evolution of the model used at Salerno, where forces were grouped together by service—as opposed to purely functional—component. But in many respects the structure is similar. In both cases, senior warfighters representing land, sea and air are coequal in command authority, reporting to a shared superior. It is decidedly not the same as the vertical structure used at Guadalcanal and Tarawa, where the landing force commander was firmly subordinate to Navy command.

Since the modern joint task force organization is based on the principle of coequal command, it makes sense for amphibious forces to be similarly configured. The component command model acknowledges that each of the subordinate commanders represents a specialized military skill that must be given equal voice if the joint force commander is to be given the best possible advice. The adoption of the supported-supporting relationship in amphibious command structures simply recognizes the substantial role landing force commanders must play in planning, executing and commanding amphibious operations.

## **Conclusion**

As Julian Smith pointed out, successful coequal command depends on trusting personal relationships and close cooperation. It is a move towards the British understanding of the

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<sup>43</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, *Expeditionary Operations*, MCDP-3 (Washington, DC:

principles of war, towards unity of effort over unity of command, towards faith in people instead of faith in systems. As a doctrine, supported-supporting command relations clearly establish priorities for the allocation of resources, placing directive control in a single commander's hands without the cumbersome additional responsibilities of tactical or operational command. If there is a balance to be struck, current doctrine depends on changes in the capabilities and needs of amphibious operations to shift away from unity of command back towards the principle of paramount interest espoused by the Joint Board in 1935.

The advent of the Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) presents a new choice. An ESG adds considerable Navy combat power to the traditional configuration of an amphibious squadron, as the core of three amphibious ships are joined by a cruiser, two destroyers and a submarine. Experiments in command and control of this larger force have focused on two models. On the East Coast, the Amphibious Squadron Commander's staff has been expanded to cope with the new responsibilities, while the coequal relationship with the Landing Force Commander has been maintained. There is no common superior at sea. On the West Coast, the two coequal Navy and Marine Corps commanders have been joined at sea by a flag officer responsible for the whole force. In effect, this is a return to the unity of command model exercised in the Pacific in World War II.

Which of the two models best reflects the lessons of the last century? Unity of command worked well in the Pacific, and was the underlying principle for sixty years of amphibious doctrine in both the United States and NATO. The West Coast ESG, with an embarked flag officer, would best reflect and build on this tradition.

But there were good reasons for the change in doctrine to a supported-supporting relationship between the Navy and Marine Corps. It represents a maturation of the command

and control interactions in today's complex battlespace. Coequal command within the ESG offers a more flexible, sophisticated force structure to the joint task force commander, who should not have to reach down through a Navy commander to assign missions to the embarked Marine force. Where the West Coast ESG model adds a layer of command, the East Coast model maintains a clean simplicity that ensures equal access to the joint force commander for both Navy and Marine Corps commanders.

## **Recommendations**

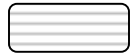
- The supported-supporting relationship between the Amphibious Squadron Commander and the Landing Force Commander works well and should be kept. It is a sensible, logical evolution of command and control doctrine that makes good use of modern military capability, configuring amphibious forces to best contribute to joint operations.
- Command and control experiments with the Expeditionary Strike Group should be decided in favor of the East Coast model, which preserves the coequal command structure espoused in Joint Publication 3-02, *Amphibious Operations*.



## Command and Control Diagrams



Navy Commander



Landing Force Commander

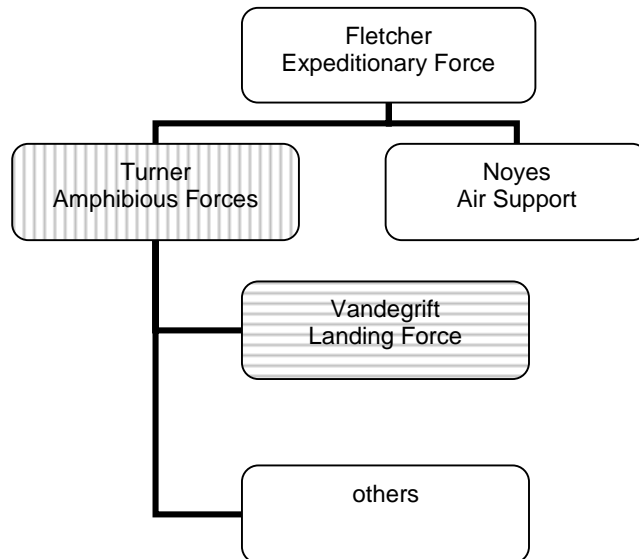


Fig 1: Guadalcanal

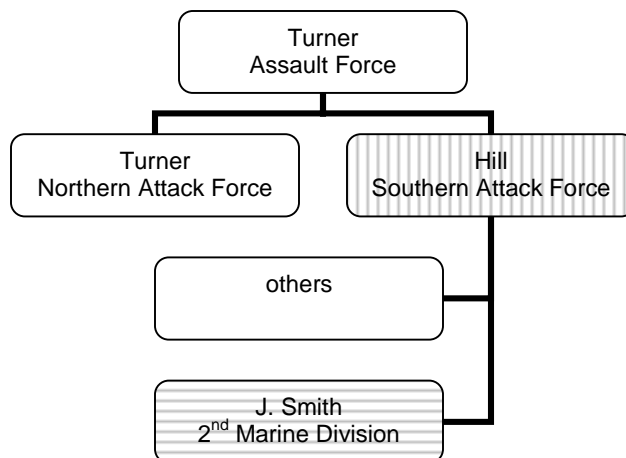


Fig 2: Tarawa

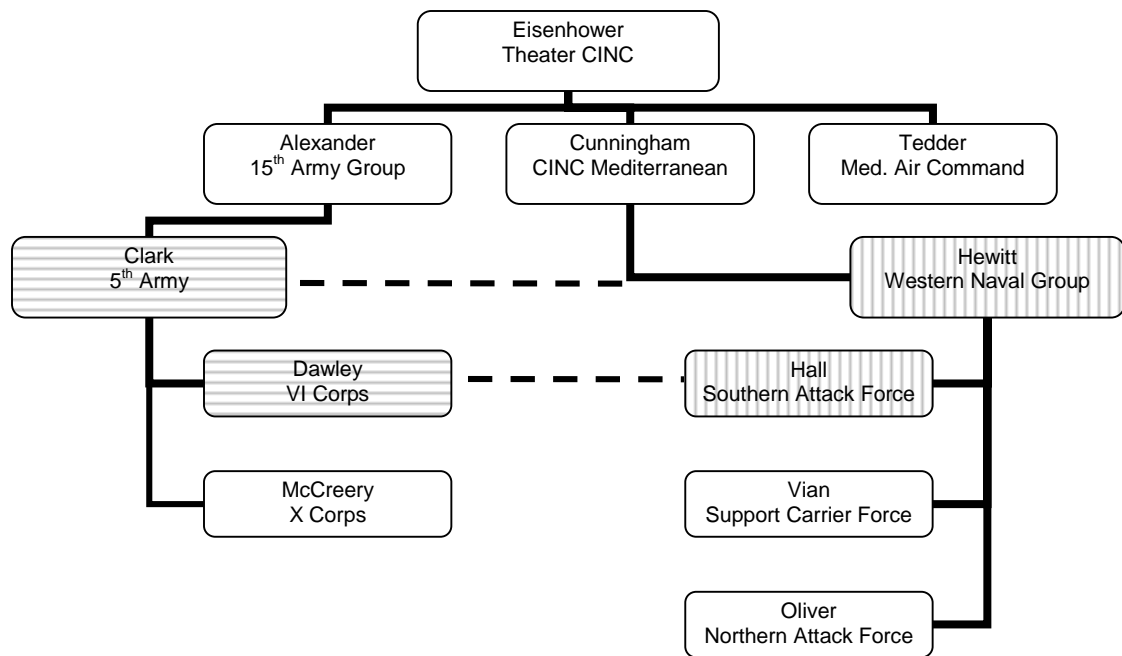


Fig 3: Salerno

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